

# What's in a Name?

## Early Evidence of Devotion Exclusively to Yahweh

By Jeffrey H. Tigay



Idolatry is one of Israel's most heinous sins, according to the biblical authors. The Tablets of the Law that Moses brings down from Mt. Sinai begin with the line: "I, YHWH (Yahweh), am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage. *You shall have no other gods besides me.*" Despite this, the prophets rail against Israel's tendency to chase after other deities: "For your gods have become as many as your towns, O Judah, and you have set up as many altars to Shame [a derogatory reference to Baal] as there are streets in Jerusalem—altars for sacrifice to Baal" (Jeremiah 2:28, 11:13).

Many scholars agree that ancient Israel was a polytheistic society. The dominant view today is that the Israelite populace as a whole was not monotheistic (believing in the existence of only one god) or even monolatrous (worshiping one god while not necessarily denying the existence of others) until the period of the Babylonian Exile, in the sixth century B.C.E.

One tool commonly used to measure Israel's polytheism is onomastics—the study of names. Both biblical and extrabiblical Israelite names are known to incorporate the names of gods—often YHWH (Yahweh), the name of the Israelite deity, but also the names of foreign gods. These names are called theophoric names, from the Greek for "bearing a god." Examples include Saul's son Eshbaal and grandson Merib-baal (1 Chronicles 8:33–34, 9:39–40), whose names incorporate the term *baal*. Similarly, the judge Gideon is sometimes referred to as Jerubbaal (Judges 6:32, 7:1, 8:29). Among the Canaanites, Baal, which literally means "lord," was the title of the storm god Haddu/Hadad, but it was used so frequently that it functioned essentially as his name, as it is often used in the Bible. Its basic generic sense is still reflected in the fact that in the Bible (when it isn't part of a personal name), it is always preceded by a definite article—"the Baal," as in Judges 6:25–32. Names containing this term, scholars suggest, are evidence of Baal worship among early Israelites.



But the evidence of onomastics, as we shall see, is not quite so clear. First, there are problems in assuming that every use of a theophoric name necessarily connotes worship of a particular god. Second, and even more significant, the appearance of non-Yahwistic theophoric names in the Bible is remarkably rare. The names that Israelites gave their children do not support

the case for widespread polytheism.

Both sides of the debate acknowledge the great significance attributed to names in the Bible (as in ancient Near Eastern literature in general).<sup>1</sup> In Genesis, God names the things he creates. Adam names the animals. Both God and humans bestow or change the names of characters in the narratives such as Abram (who is renamed Abraham), Sarai (Sarah) and Jacob (Israel).

Biblical names have meaning, and the Bible often explains their significance to us. The first woman is called Woman (*'ishah*) because, it is said, she is taken from the body of the man (*'ish*) and then Eve (*h'avvah*) because she is the mother of all living things ("life," *hay*). Babylon (*babel*) is so named because God mixed up (*balal*) the languages of the tower-builders.

Many of the Bible's explanations of names are not real etymologies but simply play on the sound of names. The etymology of *Babel* is uncertain. Babylonian scribes understood it as "God's Gate" (*bāb 'ilim* in Akkadian, the Babylonian language); in any case, it is certainly not derived from Hebrew *balal*, since its consonants, though similar, are not identical (Akkadian *b-b-'l* versus Hebrew *b-l-l*). The false biblical explanation of Babel was invented to mock the grandiose Babylonian city. The name Jacob (*y'qb*, from the root *'q-b*) most likely means "may he [the deity] protect (*'q-b*) [this child]," but the Bible connects it to Jacob's grasping of Esau's heel (*'eqeb*) at birth.



Such explanations are so clever that they could easily lead us to overlook the fact that the Bible is also perfectly capable of giving literal, etymologically correct explanations of names. For example, the angel's instruction to Hagar to call her son Ishmael (*yishma'el*) "because the Lord has paid heed to your suffering" (Genesis 16:11) reflects the name's literal meaning: "God (*'el*) hears" (*yishma' 'el*), much as Leah's choice of the name of her second son Simeon (*shim'on*, also from *shama'*, "hear") is because "the Lord heard" that she was suffering (Genesis 29:33).

Ancient Hebrew personal names (and those in related ancient languages) fall roughly into two categories, secular and theophoric.

Secular names usually consist of a single noun, such as Rachel ("ewe"), Caleb ("dog"), Deborah ("bee"), and Jonah ("dove"). Other secular names are adjectives describing the child, such as Zuar ("small," in Numbers 1:8), Sheharhor ("black," on a Hebrew seal<sup>2</sup>) and Ne'ehebet ("beloved," on a seal<sup>3</sup>); a few refer to the circumstances of the child's birth, such as Bechorat ("firstborn," Saul's ancestor in 1 Samuel 9:1). There are also compound phrases such as Hepzibah ("I take delight in her," in 2 Kings 21:1) and Ahab (*'ah-'ab*, "father's brother," in 1 Kings 16:28, etc., which may mean "just like the father's brother" or "replacement for the father's deceased brother").

Theophoric names, which fall into the second category, are more revealing religiously in that they are statements about the deity or about the worshiper's relationship to the deity. They consist of the name, title or epithet of the deity and a word referring to an act or quality of the deity or of the person who bears the name. The names Jonathan (*Yo-natan*, "YHWH gave [this child]"),<sup>a</sup> Joshua (*Yeho-shua'*, "YHWH is a noble"), Elijah (*'eli-yahu*, "YHWH is my God"), Neriah (*Neri-yah[u]*, "YHWH is my light"), Zurishaddai (*Tzuri-shadday*, "My Rock is Shaddai"), Uzziyah (*'Uzzi-yah[u]*, "YHWH is my strength") and Abinoam ("My [divine] Father is pleasant") are all statements about the deity.<sup>b</sup> Obadiah (*'Ebed-yah[u]*, "servant of YHWH") and Mattaniah (*Mattan-yah[u]*, "gift of YHWH") describe the name-bearer.

Among the most common elements in Israelite names are verbs such as *hanan* (meaning "favor, be gracious"), *'azar* ("help"), *yasha'* ("save"), *shama'* ("heed") and *shafat* ("judge favorably"); nouns such as *ner* ("light"), *'ab* ("father"), *'adon* ("lord") and *melekh* ("king"), all used to describe or relate to God; and nouns such as *'ebed* ("servant") and *mattan* ("gift"), used of humans. Clearly, theophoric names are expressions of religious beliefs and attitudes: gratitude, or hope, for God's beneficence, blessing and protection; recognition of his greatness and incomparability; submission to his authority; and the like.

Hebrew and the other Northwest Semitic languages spoken by Israel's closest neighbors were very similar to each other, and the personal names used in these languages were also very similar. For example, the name Menahem meaning "console," "consoler," referring either to God or the child, appears in Hebrew, Ugaritic, Phoenician and Ammonite.<sup>4</sup> The similar names suggest a similarity in religious feelings shared by these neighboring societies. The major difference between names in Israel and its neighbors is the deity mentioned in the theophoric names. The onomastica of other societies use the names of many

deities. The overwhelming majority of theophoric names in Israel mention YHWH.

According to one count, of some 521 biblical individuals bearing theophoric names from the patriarchal period through the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., 475 (91 percent) bear Yahwistic names (that is, they contain the name YHWH; these first appear in significant numbers in the period of the monarchy). Only 46 (9 percent) bear names that clearly, or at least plausibly, contain the names of other gods.<sup>5</sup> The latter group include such names as Pashhur, which contains the name of the Egyptian god Horus (Hur) (Jeremiah 20:1 etc.);<sup>6</sup> 'Aznavet, meaning "Mawet [the Canaanite god or spirit of death] is strong" (2 Samuel 23:31 etc.); Reshep (a Canaanite god) (1 Chronicles 7:25); and (assuming he was an Israelite), Shamgar ben (son of) Anath (Judges 3:31), whose given name apparently invokes the Hurrian sun-god Shimike, while his patronym (father's name) invokes the Canaanite goddess Anath.



Seven biblical Israelites (including Eshbaal, Merib-baal and Jerubbaal) bear names that clearly contain the element Baal.<sup>7</sup> But these references are not necessarily intended to evoke the Canaanite deity of that name. As noted above, Baal is a generic term that literally means "lord." Although it regularly refers to the Canaanite deity, it was sometimes used as a title for YHWH,<sup>8</sup> as the prophet Hosea 2:18 seems to imply: "And in that day—declares the Lord—you will call [Me] 'Ishi' ('my husband'), and you will *no longer* call Me 'my Baal.'" It seems likely that Hosea expected the title to be abandoned because of its association with the Canaanite deity.



Notably, other than Baal, the deities mentioned in these names are *not* the deities that the Bible says the Israelites worshiped. In the Bible, the people are accused of worshiping the deities Bethel (Jeremiah 48:13);<sup>9</sup> Milkom, god of the Ammonites (1 Kings 11:5, 33; 2 Kings 23:13); Kemosh, god of Moab (1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 23:13); Tammuz (Ezekiel 8:14); Moloch (Leviticus 18:21, 20:2–5; 2 Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 32:35);<sup>9</sup> and especially Asherah or Ashtoreth (Judges 2:13, 3:7, 10:6; 1 Samuel 12:10; 1 Kings 11:5, 33; 18:19; 2 Kings 23:4, 13).<sup>10</sup> Not one of these deities' names appears as part of an Israelite personal name in the Bible.

Further, although the books of Kings, Ezekiel and Amos say that the Israelites worshiped the sun, moon and stars (2 Kings 17:16, 21:3, 23:4–5, 11; Ezekiel 8:16; Amos 5:26), virtually no astral deities are included in Israelite names.<sup>11</sup>

The statistical picture is complicated, however, by evidence that some biblical names mentioning foreign gods were tampered with by ancient editors. For example, the men known as Eshbaal, Merib-baal, and Jerubbaal in the Book of Chronicles, are called Ish-Bosheth, Mephibosheth, and Jerubbesheth in the received Hebrew text (the Masoretic Text) of the Book of Samuel (2 Samuel 2:8, 4:4, 5:16, 11:21). It's unlikely that Ish-Bosheth, Mephibosheth, and Jerubbesheth are the original names, since *bosheth/besheth* means "shame," and parents would hardly have used it in naming their children. Thus, the readings in

Samuel were probably introduced by scribes who deliberately eliminated the element “Baal” because of its association with the Canaanite god. If scribes distorted the names in Samuel, then perhaps they did the same in other parts of the Bible. There may have originally been more biblical names mentioning foreign gods that have now been expurgated. If so, this could be further evidence of Israelite polytheism that we have lost.

One way to check whether this occurred is to study the Israelite names preserved not in the Bible but in inscriptions from the biblical period, since these have not been tampered with by later scribes. About twenty years ago, I collected all the Israelite personal names from the biblical period known from inscriptions up to that time. I expected to find numerous examples of pagan personal names—the kinds of names I suspected had been expurgated from the Bible by scribal revisions of the type just described. The results surprised me. Of the 1,200-plus individual names known from inscriptions, 671 contained a theophoric element. Seventy-eight of these had the equivocal theophoric elements *’el*, “God/god,” or *’eli*, “my god”—generic terms that probably referred to YHWH but might have referred to the Canaanite God El. Of the remaining 593 theophoric names, 557 were Yahwistic. Only 36 seemed clearly or very plausibly to refer to deities other than YHWH.<sup>12</sup> Thus, of the 593 inscriptional names with clearly identifiable deities, 94 percent were Yahwistic and only 6 percent mentioned other deities.<sup>13</sup>



The inscriptional statistics are almost the same as in the case of biblical theophoric names where Yahwistic names predominate by 91 percent to 9 percent. The similarity of these ratios suggests that editorial censorship in the Masoretic Text did not significantly distort the actual picture.

As is the case with the names mentioned in the Bible, the inscriptional names do not include any of the foreign deities (except for Baal) that the Bible says the Israelites worshiped.<sup>14</sup> Instead, the inscriptions mention the Edomite deity Qaus; the Canaanite deity or demon Mawet (the name means “Death”); what may be another Canaanite deity named Man or Min; *Sh-l-m*, which might refer to a deity mentioned in some Ugaritic texts but could also be an epithet of YHWH, meaning “(Divine) Ally” (the Bible mentions an altar named YHWH-Shalom [Judges 6:24] and the name Shelumi’el, “my *shalom* is God/a god”); the Egyptian deities Horus and Isis; the west Semitic spirits of good fortune Gad and Asher—though Gad is sometimes used as an epithet of YHWH (as in the name Gadiyahu, “YHWH is my spirit of good fortune”);<sup>15</sup> the Egyptian protective deity Bes, although Bes, as well as Mawet, Gad and Asher could be spirits (demons or angels) rather than deities; the Canaanite sea-god Yam; the sun-god Shamash; and possibly a deity called “Mistress” (*’Adutta*), although “mistress” may not be a theophoric element but an expression of the parents’ hopes for their daughter (“may she be a mistress”) or a slave name (short for something like “may my mistress live”).<sup>16</sup>



Even if all of these names do refer to other deities, there are still remarkably few of them. Elsewhere in the ancient Near East, even within a single family one often finds several deities invoked in personal names. A study of 90 families from the

Babylonian city of Sippar with three or more children found that “only in thirteen instances does one god ... appear in the names of all the offspring. And even in these cases [a different god usually] appears in the father’s theophoric name.”<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, the same study found that on seals that designate their owner as the “servant” of a particular god, “neither the name of the owner nor of his father is identical with the god of the servant phrase.”

Royal names are similarly diverse. The Neo-Assyrian king Sennacherib (*Sin-ahhe-eriba*) is named for the moon-god Sin; but he named his son Esarhaddon (*Ashur-ah-iddin*) for the god Ashur. Similarly Esarhaddon’s sons were named not only for Ashur, but for Shamash, Sin, and Sherua (*Ashur-bani-apli*, *Shamash-shuma-ukin*, *Sin-iddina-apla* and *Sherua-etirai*). Eshmunazor, a king of Sidon in the fifth century B.C.E., was named for the god Eshmun, but he was a priest and his mother a priestess of Astarte.<sup>18</sup>

In short, in the polytheistic societies of the ancient Near East, a variety of deities are commonly invoked in personal names. What, then, are we to make of the Israelite statistics? They clearly show us how rarely—less than 10 percent of the time—Israelites chose to invoke other deities, even Baal, when naming their children. But this does not necessarily mean that even that many Israelites worshiped other gods. The use of names mentioning other gods doesn’t necessarily imply the worship of those gods. For example, the names mentioning Horus, Isis and Shamash are all in foreign languages, not Hebrew, and the Hebrew-speaking parents who bestowed them may not have recognized their meaning, just as Jews and Christians today who name their children Isidora or Martin probably do not realize that these names are derived from Isis and Mars. Moreover, certain pagan names probably remained in use simply out of inertia. No one thought to reject them. Onomastic habits change slowly, and the process is not necessarily expedited by religious revolutions, even zealous ones. In later times Christians did not begin to abandon pagan theophoric names such as Isidore, Dionysius and Aphrodisius earnestly until late in the fourth century. Before that, as the church historian Adolf Harnack succinctly put it, “Here was the primitive church exterminating every vestige of polytheism in her midst, tabooing pagan mythology as devilish ... and yet freely employing the pagan names which had hitherto been in vogue!” Wrote Harnack: “The martyrs perished because they declined to sacrifice to the gods whose names they bore!”<sup>19</sup> It may be assumed that a certain percentage of pagan theophoric names survived in Israel, too, simply out of inertia, without their users acknowledging the deities they mention.



Furthermore, some of the individuals bearing these names may not have been Israelites. The extrabiblical inscriptions bearing the name of the God Qaus come from sites in the Negev, where Edomites frequently migrated and which Edom sometimes controlled, so it is possible that the bearers of Qaus-names are Edomites. Further, all but two of the inscriptions containing Baal names come from a single period at a single site, the northern capital of Samaria in the early or middle eighth century B.C.E. The names probably belonged to people connected with the government, and thus could represent foreigners, perhaps Phoenicians, in the service of the northern monarchy, comparable to Doeg the Edomite, Uriah the Hittite, and other foreigners serving Saul and David (1 Samuel 21:8; 2 Samuel 11:3, 15:19; 1 Chronicles 2:17).

But again, the remarkable thing is that even if these names do all belong to Israelites and they do refer to other deities and their meanings were known to those who bestowed them, their number is still so low.

On the other hand, the high percentage of Yahwistic names does not necessarily point to an equal percentage of monotheists or monolatrists. First, the absence of a deity from the onomasticon from a particular society does not in and of itself prove that that deity was not worshiped in that society.<sup>20</sup> Based on ritual texts from Ugarit, we know that the goddesses Athtart (Ashtoret, Astarte), Athirat (Asherah) and Anath were all worshiped with sacrifices there,<sup>21</sup> but they appear infrequently in personal names.<sup>22</sup> The Punic west of the mid- to late first millennium B.C.E. produced thousands of stelae dedicated to the goddess Tannit, but personal names invoking her were relatively few.<sup>23</sup> Even in Israel, as noted above, names containing YHWH do not appear in significant numbers until the monarchic period.

Furthermore, even polytheists could give some or all of their children Yahwistic names if Yahweh was *one* of the gods they worshipped. King Ahab, the sponsor of northern Israelite Baal-worship in the ninth century, had sons named Ahaziah and J(eh)oram (1 Kings 22:40; 2 Kings 3:1). Athaliah, who may have been King Ahab’s daughter, also had a Yahwistic name (1



All of this shows that personal names reflect only one facet of the religious life of a particular society. Although they constitute an important piece of evidence, they do not of themselves solve the question of how many Israelites worshiped other gods in addition to YHWH. They must be combined with evidence from other types of inscriptions: Hebrew letters that invoke divine blessings on the recipient, votive inscriptions and prayers for blessing, oath formulas, religious graffiti, references to Israelite temples, temple vessels and cultic personnel, and Hebrew amulets. This evidence, which I have surveyed elsewhere, is mostly though not exclusively Yahwistic, presenting a picture essentially similar to that presented by the personal names.<sup>24</sup> In my judgment, the extensive biblical indictments of the Israelites for idolatry, though doubtless based in fact, are probably rhetorical exaggerations by the prophets for polemical purposes and by historians to explain Israel's military reverses and eventual Exile.

At first glance, it would seem that the Babylonian Exile had little impact on the Israelite onomasticon. The vast majority (96 percent) of Exilic and post-Exilic Israelites in the Bible<sup>25</sup> who have theophoric names have Yahwistic ones.<sup>26</sup> This is about the same percentage (91 percent) as in pre-Exilic Israel. But there is a significant difference: For the first time in centuries or perhaps ever (depending on what the *baal* in Saul's descendants' names refers to), Israel's leaders have names that refer to foreign gods.

The leader of the first group of Jews who returned to Jerusalem after 538 B.C.E., when the Persian king Cyrus granted them permission, was Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah (Ezra 1:8, 5:14 etc.). His Babylonian name seems to be a form of *Sin-ab-utzur*, "O Sin (the Babylonian moon god), guard the father."<sup>27</sup> A later group of exiles was led back to Jerusalem by another royal heir, Zerubbabel ben (son of) Shealtiel, who was appointed governor of Judah by the Persian king Darius in 522–521 B.C.E., while the Temple was being rebuilt (Haggai 1:1 etc.). The name Zerubbabel, though not theophoric, is equivalent to the Akkadian *Zer-babili*, "offspring of Babylon." Zerubbabel was accompanied by men named Mordecai (from the name of the god Marduk), Bilshan (Akkadian *Belshunu*, "their lord"), and Bigvai, derived from Persian *baga*, "god" (Ezra 2:2; Nehemiah 7:7). The Book of Esther, of course, also mentions the better-known Mordecai, the cousin and foster-father of Queen Esther (Esther 2:5), and Esther herself, whose name seems to have been derived either from the name of the goddess Ishtar or from Persian *stāra*, "star."<sup>28</sup>



That Jews in Exile began to adopt Babylonian names, theophoric as well as nontheophoric, is also shown by the names of Jews mentioned in Akkadian business documents of the Murashu family in the Babylonian city of Nippur. More than 800 documents from the archives of this firm have been found, from the years 455 to 403 B.C.E. These documents indicate that Jews lived scattered in various villages around the city, farming, fishing and working in minor government posts. About 70 of the tablets contain names of people who, according to the late Elias Bickerman, are identifiably Jewish—that is, either they or their relatives (usually their fathers or sons) have Yahwistic or otherwise clearly Jewish names.<sup>29</sup>

The fathers in these documents were born sometime around 510 to 500 B.C.E. and their sons after 480 B.C.E., according to Bickerman. In his study of those cases where both the fathers' and sons' names were known, Bickerman found that fifteen of the fathers bore clearly non-Jewish, mostly Babylonian, theophoric names; thirteen bore Yahwistic names. But the remarkable thing is that the Yahwistic names doubled in popularity from the generation of the fathers to that of the sons, while the Babylonian theophoric names virtually disappeared: Twenty-seven sons had Yahwistic names and one at most had a Babylonian theophoric one.

Apparently, at some point in the century following the Exile, Jews living in Babylonia adopted Babylonian names, just as they

adopted the Aramaic language and script (the latter, though much evolved, still used in Israel today) and the Babylonian month names then in use in Babylonia (and also still in use today). But around the year 480, approximately 60 years after the Jews began to return to Jerusalem and 35 years after the Temple was rebuilt (in 515 B.C.E.), Jewish parents in Nippur began to shun pagan names for their children. We are not sure why. Perhaps the return of some exiles to Jerusalem and their rebuilding of the Temple stimulated a renewal of Yahwistic loyalty as reflected in these names. Bickerman concluded that in fact “this onomastic shift explains the success of Ezra and Nehemiah ... Were it not for the ‘YHWH-alone’ groups in Nippur and elsewhere in Babylonia and the Persian Diaspora, who cajoled and convinced the Persian court, Ezra in 458 and Nehemiah in 445 would not have been sent to re-establish the [Israelite religion] in Jerusalem.”<sup>30</sup> The return to Hebrew and Yahwistic names indicates, in other words, a reassertion of Jewish ethnic and religious identity.<sup>31</sup>

A midrash<sup>d</sup> from the Talmudic period (70-600 C.E.) claims that God redeemed the Israelites from bondage in Egypt because they had not abandoned Hebrew names or the Hebrew language, they were not guilty of unchastity, and they did not inform on one another.<sup>32</sup> The midrash explains that when the Israelites went down to Egypt they had such names as Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Joseph, and Benjamin (see Genesis 46 and Exodus 1), and they used the same names when they left Egypt (as evidenced by the tribal names in Numbers 1); as the midrash explains, Reuben didn't change his name to Rufus, Judah to Lulianus, Joseph to Justus, Benjamin to Alexander, and the like. Alexander, Lulianus, Justus, etc., are Greco-Roman names, and the midrash's anachronistic assumption that Israelites might have adopted these names in Ramesside Egypt can only bring a smile to our lips. Clearly, the midrash is addressing the phenomenon of Jews adopting such names during the Roman period, when the midrash was composed, not in the time of the Exodus. Nevertheless, the midrash correctly perceives that personal names, like language and good morals, are an expression of values, loyalty and identity. The ancient Israelite onomasticon alone is not enough to tell us definitively whether exclusive devotion to a single God was one of those cherished values—although it strongly suggests that it was. And it certainly tells us that we can no longer use names as evidence of rampant polytheism in ancient Israel.

# Named After Which God?

Sidebar to: What's in a Name?

From the time of the Exodus on, Israelite personal names that incorporated the name of the God YHWH were far more popular than those mentioning pagan deities. The numbers shown here are based only on names in the Bible. The extrabiblical evidence (not included here) is slightly stronger: 94% of the theophoric names known from inscriptions are Yahwistic, as opposed to 91% in the Bible.

Period	Total Number of Theophoric Names	Yahwistic Names	Probable Pagan Names
Patriarchal	2	0 (0%)	2 (100%)
Exodus-Settlement	4	3 (75%)	1 (25%)
Judges-United Monarchy (1200–931 B.C.E.)	154	137 (89%)	17 (11%)
Divided Monarchy (931–724 B.C.E.)	111	108 (97%)	3 (3%)
Late Judah-Exile (727-538 B.C.E.)	125	119 (95%)	6 (5%)
Probably Not Post-Exilic (538-c. 400 B.C.E.)	125	108 (86%)	17 (14%)
Total	521	475 (91%)	46 (9%)

(Based on Dana M. Pike, “Israelite Theophoric Personal Names in the Bible and Their Implications for Religious History” [Univ. of Pennsylvania Ph.D. dissertation, 1990], with adjustments by Jeffrey H. Tigay noted in endnote 5 of this article.)

Footnotes:

- a. The name of the deity YHWH, the God of Israel, often appears in shortened form as *Yeho-* or *Yo-* (“Jeho-” or “Jo-” in translations) when used at the beginning of a name, and *-yahu*, *-yah*, or *-yo* (“-iahu,” “-iah/jah” or “-io” in translations) at the end of a name.
- b. Shaddai, or El Shaddai, is a name of God that is especially frequent in Genesis (17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3) and in poetry (e.g., Genesis 49:25; Numbers 24:4, 16; and frequently in Job), and according to Exodus 6:3 it is the name by which YHWH revealed himself to the patriarchs. Often rendered “Almighty,” its meaning is uncertain; one modern suggestion, based on Akkadian *šadû*, “mountain,” takes it to mean “the One of the Mountain.”

c. The essentially synonymous term Adonai (literally “my Lord,” from ‘*adon*, “Lord,” eventually became the preferred title of YHWH. It, too, now functions as a name. In Jewish practice to this day, out of respect for God’s name, wherever the Hebrew text of the Bible says YHWH, it is usually pronounced Adonai and not Yahweh.

d. Midrash is a homiletic exposition of the biblical text by the rabbis of the Talmudic period (70-600 C.E.) and later. The term refers both to individual interpretations of this sort and to anthologies and compilations of such.

Endnotes:

1. See A.F. Key, “The Giving of Proper Names in the Old Testament,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83 (1954), pp. 55-59.

2. Nahman Avigad and Benjamin Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Israel Exploration Society, and Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997), p. 153, no. 357.

3. Avigad and Sass, *Corpus*, p. 64, no. 39.

4. In addition to the biblical king Menahem (2 Kings 15:14), see James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ANET), 3d ed. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), p. 553a; Frauke Gröndahl, *Die Personennamen der Texte aus Ugarit*, Studia Pohl 1 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967), p. 165; Frank L. Benz, *Personal Names in the Phoenician and Punic Inscriptions*, Studia Pohl 8 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1972), p. 360; Avigad and Sass, *Corpus*, p. 514.

5. These statistics are based on data collected by Dana M. Pike, “Israelite Theophoric Personal Names in the Bible and Their Implications for Religious History” (Univ. of Pennsylvania Ph.D. dissertation, 1990) esp. p. 11, table 10. Pike’s own statistical conclusions differ from those presented in the chart because he does not count names containing *ba’al*. While I think it doubtful that the *ba’al* names refer to the Canaanite god, I have nevertheless counted them as plausibly pagan in my statistics since many scholars view them that way and I wanted to give the case for pagan names every reasonable benefit of the doubt. After recomputing Pike’s statistics to include *ba’al* names, the breakdown of theophoric names in the Bible by period is roughly as appears on my chart.

In the chart, names with the elements ‘*el*’ or ‘*eli*’ are disregarded here since they are equivocal: ‘*el*’ can mean “God” or “the god” (‘*eli*’ = my god) or can refer to the Canaanite deity El. Even when it has the latter meaning, it is difficult to tell whether the Canaanite deity is meant, or whether it was understood as a synonym of YHWH (there is little evidence that the Israelites worshiped El as a deity distinct from YHWH).

6. Shmuel Ahituv, “Pashhur,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 20 (1970), pp. 95–96.

7. The others are (a) Baal, 1 Chronicles 5:5, the father of a man exiled by Tiglath-Pileser; (b) another Baal, 1 Chronicles 8:30 and 9:36; (c) David’s son Beeliada, 1 Chronicles 14:7 (called Eliada in 2 Samuel 5:16 and 1 Chronicles 3:8); and (d) Baalhanan, 1 Chronicles 27:28. “Mephibosheth” the son of Saul in 2 Samuel 21:8 may imply an eighth. See the discussion by P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel*, Anchor Bible 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), pp. 85-87, 124-125, 128, 439. I do not include other names that are only conjectured to include *ba’al*, since they can be explained plausibly in their present forms. See Jeffrey H. Tigay, *You Shall Have No Other Gods: Israelite Religion in the Light of Hebrew Inscriptions*, Harvard Semitic Studies 31 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), p. 8 n. 10; Pike, “Israelite Theophoric Personal Names,” pp. 109–120.

8. Cf. Genesis 31:13, 35:7. See Wolfgang Röllig, s.v. “Bethel,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn et al., 2d ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 173–175.

9. Whether Moloch represents the name of a deity is debated; see Moshe Weinfeld, “The Worship of Molech and the Queen of Heaven and Its Background,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 4 (1972), pp. 133–154; Morton Smith, “On Burning Babies,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95 (1975), pp. 477–479; Weinfeld, “Burning Babies in Ancient Israel,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 10 (1978), pp. 411–413; and Lawrence E. Stager, “Child Sacrifice at Carthage—Religious Rite or Population Control?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* (BAR), January/February 1984.

10. Most references to ‘*asherah*’ in the Bible are to a tree or some other type of object that may or may not symbolize the goddess. See Ruth Hestrin, “Understanding Asherah—Exploring Semitic Iconography,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, September/October 1991.

11. “Samson” (Shimshon, from *shemesh*, “sun”) could refer to the sun-god Shamash, but it is just as likely to be a characterization of its bearer as “sunny.”

12. For details see Tigay, *No Other Gods*. These statistics now include the name Baalhanan inscribed on a seal impression (Avigad and Sass, *Corpus*, no. 297) that I had overlooked in *No Other Gods*. There are other names that could conceivably refer to other deities, but more likely do not. For those in the inscriptions, see *No Other Gods*, appendix 3; for those in the Bible, see Pike, “Israelite Theophoric Personal Names.” Since the publication of *No Other Gods*, numerous other Hebrew inscriptions have been published, and the number of individuals with Yahwistic personal names has increased considerably. I

am not aware of any further pagan names that have been discovered, but even if a few have been, if all the new names were factored in, the statistical predominance of Yahwistic names over those mentioning other deities would be even greater today.

13. As noted, these statistics are based on all inscriptions that had been published when *You Shall Have No Other Gods* was written. Many of the inscriptions (mainly seal inscriptions) were acquired in the antiquities market and hence their provenience is unknown, their date uncertain and some may be modern forgeries (see the comments of J. Naveh and B. Sass in Avigad and Sass, *Corpus*, pp. 12, 15, 453–460; Nili S. Fox, *In the Service of the King: Officialdom in Ancient Israel and Judah* [Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000], pp. 23–32); they are classified as Israelite or non-Israelite on paleographic or onomastic grounds, which are not foolproof. Since we cannot exclude the possibility of forgery or erroneous classification as Israelite, the statistics were calculated in two ways. The first was restricted to names that appear in inscriptions on objects acquired in controlled archaeological excavations at Israelite sites or, if the names are explicitly identified as Israelite, abroad. The second consists of all Israelites whose names are preserved in epigraphic sources, including those found on the surface and those acquired in the antiquities market and identified as Israelite by paleographic or onomastic evidence. These two sets of statistics do not differ from each other significantly: In the corpus of names found in controlled archaeological excavations 213 (91.4 percent) are Yahwistic and 20 (8.6 percent) are likely to be pagan. This means that even if there are some forged or non-Israelite inscriptions in the larger corpus, they have not significantly skewed the evidence we are considering.

14. It has sometimes been suggested that fear of persecution would have dissuaded polytheistic Israelites from invoking other deities in their children's names, but this is unlikely since many of the inscriptional names come from the time of Manasseh, whose 55-year-long reign (698–42 B.C.E.) was the most hospitable to polytheism of any period in Judah's history (2 Kings 21:1–18). It is of course possible that factors extraneous to meaning, such as fashion, tradition or aesthetics, influenced some parents' choice of names, but what is important for present purposes is that the divine name within Hebrew personal names could not have gone unrecognized.

15. See Tigay, *No Other Gods*, p. 49; cf. biblical Gaddiel (Numbers 13:10).

16. Avigad and Sass, *Corpus* pp. 62, 477.

17. R. Harris, "Notes on the Nomenclature of Old Babylonian Sippar," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 24 (1972), p. 103.

18. *ANET*, p. 662.

19. Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), pp. 422–430.

20. See, further, Tigay, *No Other Gods*, pp. 19–20; Saul Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), p. 37.

21. See Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, *Analecta Orientalia* 38 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), texts 23:3, 1:6 and 3:16.

22. Athtart appears in no names, Athirat in one, and Anath in a dozen or so names, relatively few for Ugarit. See Gröndahl, *Die Personennamen der Texte aus Ugarit*, pp. 103, 111, and 83.

23. Olyan, *Asherah*, pp. 35–37.

24. See Tigay, *No Other Gods*, chapter 2. Iconographic evidence must also be considered. I briefly reviewed the evidence as it appeared to me at the time in *No Other Gods*, Appendix F. Today such a review would have to take account of further evidence discussed in more recent works, such as Karel van der Toorn, ed., *The Image and the Book* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997); Otto Keel and Carl Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); and Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), esp. chap. 4 (see also Zevit's analysis of theophoric toponyms, pp. 592–609); Ephraim Stern, "Pagan Yahwism: The Folk Religion of Ancient Israel," *BAR* May/June, 2001, pp. 20–29 (see also my comments on "syncretistic Yahwism," in Tigay "The Significance of the End of Deuteronomy [Deuteronomy 34:10–12]," in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran*, ed. M.V. Fox et al. [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbraun's], pp. 137–143). As in the case of pagan names, an important question about polytheistic iconography is to determine what percentage of the Israelite population venerated the gods depicted. I continue to believe (cf. Tigay, *No Other Gods*, p. 92) that verbal (textual/inscriptional) evidence is more telling: In a population in which relatively few people invoked deities other than YHWH in names, blessings, votive inscriptions, prayers, oath formulas, religious graffiti, amulets, etc., the polytheism represented by the iconography was probably no more widespread.

25. The inscriptional evidence is not very helpful here, simply because it is difficult to identify Israelites as Israelites unless they bear Yahwistic names. Babylonian and Assyrian scribes rarely identified people by nationality, and Israelite names were so similar to those of other Northwest Semitic peoples that it is difficult to tell them apart. Even if we hear of a Menahem or Michael or Elisha in Mesopotamia, we can't be sure if he is an Israelite or, for example, a Moabite or Ammonite or Phoenician.

26. See Pike, p. 311, table 10. The vast majority of post-Exilic names are those mentioned in the books of Haggai, Zechariah

and Ezra-Nehemiah. See especially Ezra 2:1–61 (=Nehemiah 7:6–63); Ezra 8:2–14, 16–19, 10:18–44, Nehemiah 3:2–31, 8:4, 7, 10:2–28, 11:4–5.

**27.** Others think that Sheshbazzar is derived from Babylonian Shamash-apla-utzur, “Shamash [the sun-god], guard the child” (Shamash-apla-utzur > Shawash-bala-utzur > Shawash-bal-tzur > Shashbatzar > Sheshbatzar).

**28.** Esther was also called Hadassah (“Myrtle”), and since that name is mentioned first (Esther 2:7), perhaps that was her original name and Esther was given to her later (perhaps as a royal name, when she married Ahasuerus). Likewise Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were given the Babylonian names Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego in addition to their Hebrew names (Daniel 1:6–7).

**29.** Elias Bickerman, “The Generation of Ezra and Nehemiah,” *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* 45 (1978), pp. 1–28.

**30.** Bickerman, “The Generation of Ezra and Nehemiah,” p. 24.

**31.** Bickerman’s colleague Morton Smith (both scholars taught at Columbia University) held that Bickerman’s view was “a possible and plausible explanation of the facts,” but nonetheless suggested that an alternative explanation was possible: “that the parents who bore pagan names were not Judeans, and that their imposition of Yahwist names on their children was due to the increasing repute of Yahweh as a god of miraculous powers,” partly due, perhaps, to the rebuilding of his Temple. Since Isaiah 56:3, 6 indicates that there were indeed gentiles in Babylonia who “attached themselves to YHWH,” it is possible that some of the pagan-named men who gave their sons Yahwistic names were among them. See Morton Smith, “Jewish Religious Life in the Persian Period,” in W.D. Davies and Louis Finkelstein, eds., *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 1, *The Persian Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), p. 222.

**32.** Leviticus Rabbah 32:5 and parallel sources. Discussion by Saul Lieberman, *Studies in Palestinian Talmudic Literature*, ed. David Rosenthal (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), pp. 129–130, 425 (in Hebrew); M. Mirkin, *Midrash Rabbah*, 2nd ed. (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1972), *Shmot*, part 1, pp. 43–44 (in Hebrew).